



CATAWBA COUNTY

3070 11th Ave. Dr. SE - Hickory, NC 28602 - (828) 695-5800 - Fax (828) 695-4410 - TDD (828) 695-5155

Public Health

Breastfeeding Peer Counselors: Making a Difference for WIC Families in Catawba County

HICKORY, NC – New mothers in Catawba County Public Health’s Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program are getting help and support in breastfeeding their babies from experienced moms, thanks to the North Carolina WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program.

Mother-to-mother support has proven to be one of the most successful approaches to encourage mothers to breastfeed their babies. Studies have shown that mothers who experience a peer counselor contact during pregnancy choose to breastfeed at a higher rate than those who do not.

The NC WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program was initiated to improve infant health through increases in the practice of breastfeeding. The goals of the program are to increase the number of pregnant WIC mothers who choose to breastfeed their infants and to provide follow-up support for mothers after delivery to help them initiate and continue breastfeeding.

“The idea at the heart of the Peer Counselor Program is that mothers with breastfeeding experience have the unique ability to help and influence other mothers,” said State WIC Director Alice Lenihan.

WIC breastfeeding peer counselors are laypersons who work under the guidance of a health professional with breastfeeding expertise in their agency. They receive a training course that includes breastfeeding basics and counseling skills. WIC breastfeeding peer counselors are role models who support other mothers in giving their infant the same healthy start in life.

Catawba County’s WIC program first introduced breastfeeding peer counseling on a limited basis in 1998, but it now features two full-time breastfeeding peer counselors to help meet the needs of the community.

“Thanks to their personal experience, our breastfeeding peer counselors provide a unique level of reassurance and encouragement to the women we serve,” said Julie Byrd, WIC Director for Catawba County Public Health. “Through the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program, we offer guidance to women from pregnancy through postpartum to help ensure a positive and successful breastfeeding experience.”

Since the program began, more than 200 mothers have been trained as peer counselors in North Carolina. Today, approximately 125 peer counselors are working in 80 local agency WIC programs.

To receive WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program services, a woman or her baby must be enrolled in the WIC program. Women may apply for WIC at Catawba County Public Health Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

For more information about the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program or to make an appointment, please call (828) 695-5884 or visit www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth. More information is available on the WIC website at www.nutritionnc.com. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



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About WIC:

WIC is a federal supplemental nutrition program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women and children up to age five. The goal of the program is to help prevent nutrition-related problems in pregnancy, infancy and early childhood. WIC food vouchers are redeemable at participating food stores and farmers' markets for nutritional foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, milk, juice, eggs, cheese and cereal. WIC also provides nutrition and breastfeeding counseling. To learn more about the WIC program at CCPH, call (828) 695-5884 or visit www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth.

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